DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 349 606 CS 507 950

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TITLE Incorporating Women's Speeches as Models in the Basic Course.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Females; Feminism; Higher Education; Introductory Courses; *Public Speaking; *Speech Curriculum; *Speech Instruction; Undergraduate Students; Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS *Speech Communication Education

ABSTRACT

Studies indicate that there is a general lack of availability and use of women's speeches in college speech curricula. By incorporating more women's speeches as models, instructors of the basic course in speech can present a more complete picture of American public speaking while also encouraging women in these classes to feel less muted in their own lives. Recent speeches by such women as Barbara Bush, Kitty Carlisle Hart, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, Sarah Brady, Rosa Parks, and Maggie Kuhn represent many of the skills, issues, and areas of content likely to be discussed in a basic public speaking course. Some women leaders, including Barbara Jordan and Ann Richards, have written in detail about their preparation of important speeches, thus offering models of process as well as confirmation of the hard work and second thoughts characteristic of speech preparation. Finally, students and teachers alike should be open to re-estimations and re-evaluations of women writers and speakers. As Tillie Olsen has said, "Not to have an audience is a kind of death." (HB)

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Incorporating Women's Speeches as Models in the Basic Course

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Incorporating Women's Speeches as Models
in the Basic Course

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1991) has done extensive study of the availability of women's speeches in college-level anthologies. Her review of three current anthologies shows 95 pages devoted to women's speeches out of a total of 1515 pages. She concludes: "As reflected in recently published public address anthologies and public speaking textbooks, women are grossly underrepresented in the study of U. S. rhetorical history and as models for public speaking (p. 33)." Cheris Kramarae (1981) has described women's voices as "muted" in our culture, and Kristin S. Vonnegut (1992) finds that "the voices of women and other muted groups are almost entirely absent from the American public address classroom (p. 28)."

If women have been muted in our culture, then our political and social systems must change in order to hear their voices. But, of particular concern to the speech communication discipline, if our textbooks and classrooms have been deaf to the speeches of women, then we must begin to hear.

The reasonable place to begin is in the basic collegiate course--where a maximum number of students can encounter these voices. By incorporating more women's speeches as models, instructors of the basic course can present a more complete picture of American public speaking--and encourage young women in these classes to feel less muted in their own lives and work.

Although only minimally represented in most anthologies, speeches by women can be obtained from a variety of other sources. These models would add gender diversity to course material while illustrating specific concepts of public speaking. Following are some examples of such speeches and the uses which they can serve.

Barbara Bush's commencement address at Wellesley College (June 1, 1990)

is available on video tape from the Wellesley Alumni Association Office.[1] This tape contains the entire ceremony--including speeches by a graduating student, the Soviet Union's first lady Raisa Gorbachev, and Wellesley President Nannerl Keohane. Bush's speech had been preceded by weeks of controversy covered by the national press. Approximately 38% of the graduating class had signed a petition protesting her selection--on the grounds that she had only "gained recognition through the achievements of her husband." Bush's address is a lesson in audience adaptation, but the video tape also teaches an important lesson about respectful audience behavior in the presence of disagreement. In addition, the speech is a model of the engaging quality of a narrative illustration and the importance of this rhetorical device in gaining and holding attention. A random survey of the graduating seniors in that audience (conducted a year later by the author and Victoria DeFrancisco) found that the foremost memory in their minds was the story of the mermaid who deserved a place to stand.

Kitty Carlisle Hart delivered the keynote address to the Louisiana Cultural Caucus at a luncheon meeting at the Baton Rouge Hilton Hotel, on November 2, 1989. The text is available in the 1989-1990 edition of The Reference Shelf,[2] and commentaries on the speech can be obtained through microfilms of Baton Rouge newspapers. Hart, known as a singer, actress, and panelist on the television program "To Tell the Truth," is also an advocate and defender of the arts. At the time of the address, she had chaired the New York State Council on the Arts for 13 years. She spoke at a time of national controversy regarding public funding of the arts. The Congressional appropriation for the National Endowment for the Arts was under attack by Senator Jesse Helms and others due to NEA funding of allegedly "obscene" and

"indecent" art--particularly the photography of Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe. Hart's address, entitled "Artistic Freedom and Censorship," is a model of a speech which addresses a heated issue with reason. Her carefully chosen language builds a persuasive case without the loaded words and emotional arguments often associated with the issue. The content of her address also provides historical and philosophical comment on freedom of expression--and could be used to introduce a classroom discussion of the First Amendment.

Such a discussion might be further enhanced by studying two other speeches. Madalyn Murray O'Hair's keynote address to the American Atheists Convention in St. Petersburg, Florida (April 14, 1990) was carried by C-Span and is available on video tape.[3] O'Hair, as founder of American Atheists, has spoken often in public forums. But few of her speeches are obtainable because she and her associates believe that editors and publishers distort her views. This address, then, is a rare opportunity to hear O'Hair's unedited controversial views developed before a friendly audience. Her speech can be used as a study in reasoning. But it is also a lesson in perception--for she proves herself more thoughtful than the image created by her critics and warmer than the image perpetuated by some of her own associates. Equally important, the use of this address in a collegiate classroom demonstrates the instructor's commitment to freedom of speech--in keeping with the principles discussed by Kitty Carlisle Hart. In contrast, a graphic breakdown in freedom of expression can be illustrated by an audio tape of Sarah Brady's speech, February 7, 1992, at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas. This tape may be obtained by contacting the campus radio station.[4] Brady, an advocate of gun control, was speaking in the presence of her husband James Brady--who suffered

brain injuries during the attempted assassination of President Reagan. Although the Bradys were invited guests of the university, many in the audience had come predisposed to protest their position. As her speech progressed, she was repeatedly interrupted by escalating vocal reactions from the audience--until she was finally unable to continue. This speech can be a study of how a speaker should approach--or not approach--a hostile audience. But, in addition, the situation raises fundamental questions about the balance between legitimate protest and the right of protested views to be heard. Moreover, it can be used to introduce a classroom discussion about the content and history of the Bill of Rights--for the protesters were apparently acting in the name of the Second Amendment (guaranteeing the right to keep and bear arms) while denying the speaker's rights under the First Amendment.

A classroom discussion of speaker credibility can be complemented by viewing the speech given by Rosa Parks at Monterey Peninsula College, February 16, 1990. This speech is available on video tape and may be obtained through interlibrary loan.[5] Rosa Parks is honored for her historic contribution to the American civil rights movement when she refused to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, on December 1, 1955. From that time to the present, she has spoken often in defense of human rights. However, her words are seldom preserved or studied because she does not speak from manuscript and transcriptions of her extemporaneous remarks do not read well. This video tape, then, is an opportunity to witness the powerful ethos of this quiet woman--and to discuss the impact of speaker credibility, even in the absence of polished delivery or carefully crafted language. The lesson of her impact, as demonstrated by this speech, is particularly important in contrast to the public relations packaging and image-making that surrounds most current public

figures. Students in the basic course would do well to observe this woman whose influence is achieved solely by her message and her character.

Many aspects of public speaking, including Aristotle's belief that ethos is comprised of intelligence, character, and good will, can be demonstrated by Maggie Kuhn's keynote address to a conference entitled "Conscious Aging: A Creative and Spiritual Journey." She spoke at the Ramada Hotel in New York City, May 2, 1992. An audio tape of her address is available from the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies.[6] Kuhn, who founded the Gray Panthers in 1970, said in a recent interview with the author that she is interested in "opportunities to reach new audiences," particularly "audiences with a large geographical spread, so the message goes far and wide." She seeks audiences that include young people in her effort "to change the issue of aging and to change the images of aging." Students in a basic collegiate speech course are exactly the kind of listeners she is trying to reach. This speech is a strong example of excellent extemporaneous delivery. Kuhn speaks from an outline because her failing eye sight makes it impossible to follow a text. Nearing age 87 at the time of this address, Kuhn was seated during her speech and her voice at times was not strong. But her speech reveals a keen mind and demonstrates the compensating factors of humor, specific details, disdain for euphemisms, documentation of facts, and unusual efforts to involve her audience. In his eighties, Norman Thomas once walked very slowly and painfully to a rostrum as his audience watched with some apprehension. When he finally reached the microphone, his first words were: "I'm not as feeble as my legs." Maggie Kuhn has proven this true of herself with a wit and thoughtfulness that are both a model and message to young people.

Not all public statements occur in the traditional speaker-audience

setting, and it may be appropriate to offer students a wider definition of public speaking. Some of the most important recent "speeches" by women have been in the form of testimony at Congressional hearings or investigations--e.g., the statements of Anita Hill at the Senate confirmation hearings on Clarence Thomas and Nina Totenberg at the subsequent inquiry into leaks of information to the press. Another important statement was made by Elizabeth Taylor to the U. S. House of Representatives Task Force on Human Resources, March 6, 1990. The text is available at libraries which are depositories of government documents.[7] Taylor testified in her capacity as Founding National Chairwoman of the American Foundation for AIDS Research. Her statement demonstrates numerous elements of oral style incorporated into a manuscript--including short punctuating sentences and careful choice of language. The statement also is a model of conciseness--containing substantial specific information in minimum words. Perhaps most important, Taylor's statement is a reminder that one person can influence the legislative process. Committee chairman Barbara Boxer (1992) has said of Taylor's testimony: "In 1990, Elizabeth Taylor warned Congress that this country must prepare for the darker period that lay ahead and she was right. Her contribution to that preparation, which has brought attention, focus, and compassion to the AIDS epidemic, is greatly appreciated."

Instructors of the basic course will also find that some women leaders have written in detail about their preparation of important speeches. The process described by Barbara Jordan (1979) of preparing her statement for the Watergate committee and the stages recounted by Ann Richards (1989) in writing her 1988 keynote address to the Democratic convention can be helpful to beginning students. These speakers offer models of process as well as

product, and confirm the hard work, second thoughts, and breakthroughs that always characterize careful speech preparation.

Some years ago, Tillie Olsen (1978) called attention to the "silences" imposed on women writers, and encouraged teachers of literature to consider more of their work. In the following passage, "speakers" might be substituted for "writers" and the point would be equally valid. Olsen's last line needs no amendment.

> You who teach, read writers who are women. There is a whole literature to be re-estimated, revalued. Some works will prove to be, like the lives of their human authors, mortal--speaking only to their time. Others now forgotten, obscured, ignored, will live again for us.
>
> Read, listen to, living women writers; our new as well as our established, often neglected ones. Not to have an audience is a kind of death. (p. 43)

NOTES

[1]This video tape can be purchased from the Alumni Association Office, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA 02181.

[2]Published in The Reference Shelf: Representative American Speeches 1989-1990, Ed., Owen Peterson. New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1991.

[3]This video tape can be purchased from Purdue University Public Affairs Video Archives, Stewart Center, G-39, West Lafayette, IN 47907 (317/494-9630).

[4]An audio tape may be requested from KUNV Radio, 4505 Maryland Parkway, Los Vegas, NV 89154.

[5]This video tape, entitled "Rosa Parks at Monterey Peninsula College," may be requested through interlibrary loan from Hartnell College Media Services, 156 Homestead Avenue, Salinas, CA 93901.

[6]This audio tape, entitled "When History and Biography Intersect," can be purchased from Sounds True Conference Recordings, Dept. OCA92, 735 Walnut Street, Boulder, CO 80302 (800/333-9185).

[7]Published in pamphlet form under the title Hearing Before Task Force on Human Resources of the Committee on the Budget, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, March 7, 1990.

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